

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS LIFE-SAVING SERVICE.

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Mr. FRYE presented the following

EXTRACT FROM ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT OF THE LIFE-SAVING SERVICE FOR 1900.

COMPENSATION OF DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS.

Before closing this report it is necessary to call attention to a matter which is not only of deep concern to a most important group of officers in the service, but which has now become a source of serious embarrassment to the service itself, namely, the totally inadequate salaries provided for the district superintendents. The amounts now paid are \$1,600 in five districts and \$1,800 in the remaining seven, sums which were never commensurate with the duties required, and which, in view of the labors and responsibilities added in recent years, are now absurdly disproportionate.

Reference has been made in former reports to the meager compensation of these officers, but since 1896 relief has not been strenuously urged, for the reason that from that date until the last session of Congress the service was confronted by a danger which threatened its usefulness almost to the point of destruction, and to avert which all effort in the direction of securing legislation in behalf of the service was concentrated. That danger at length has been overcome—for the present at least—by the fixing of the wages of surfmen at a rate sufficient to secure the retention and enlistment of competent crews. In the meantime the matter now under notice has become more pressing than ever, the responsibilities of the district superintendents having so largely increased by the growth of the establishment and the corresponding multiplication of details as to interfere with the performance of some of their most important duties to an extent that menaces the welfare of the service in only a less degree than did the inequality and insufficiency of the compensation of surfmen in the instance just referred to.

This condition is brought about by the fact that the amount of office work alone of each superintendent has come to be about as great as any man can do by diligent application, and if he is to personally perform it he must neglect those duties which lie along the coast and which involve the professional and technical knowledge and experience his proficiency in which chiefly determined his selection for his office, and are indispen-

sable to the efficient management of the district affairs, and especially the proper government and supervision of the crews who perform the immediate work of rescue and relief for which the service exists. It is obvious that failure in either class of duties on the part of the superintendent must contribute to inefficiency and demoralization in proportion to the degree of failure. The incumbents of the positions concerned are for the most part men who have risen from the ranks, who have trained themselves and been trained to the tenet that "there is no such word as fail," and who, therefore, have been accustomed to make every sacrifice to prevent failure. Hence, as their duties began to press upon them in excess of their powers they uncomplainingly called to their relief clerical assistance at their own expense; but the demands upon their time have now so increased that several of them employ such assistance constantly, and most of the others a considerable portion of the time, at a cost beyond their endurance.

The amount paid by some of the superintendents for clerk hire makes a heavy inroad in their compensation, and when is added to that the sum necessary to be paid as premium for official bonds, which they are required to furnish in sums ranging from \$20,000 to \$50,000, the amount of salary left is hardly more than a pittance, which bears no proper relation to the importance of the office. It is difficult for these devoted men to provide a suitable maintenance for themselves and their families now, while still in full possession of their physical and mental powers, and absolutely impossible for them to lay up anything for the proverbial rainy day, against which there is no provision of law in their behalf when age and infirmity consequent upon the labors and dangers of their vocation shall render them incapable of further service. Therefore it is not surprising that murmurings and complaints are coming up to the Department with increasing frequency, and that from those who can least afford to pay out of their own pockets for the amount of clerical help required a less satisfactory service is obtained than formerly, both as respects office work and that upon the coast. A tendency to loose methods in the one case and demoralizing laxity in the other is discernible in place of the comparative exactness and exemplary discipline and government which have heretofore prevailed. When it is remembered that such conditions never grow better under the circumstances that induced them, but always rapidly worse, it will be recognized that there is ample cause for the grave apprehension that is felt for the future.

It would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of the kind and amount of work the superintendents perform, the responsibilities that rest upon them, and the privations and hardships they suffer without going into an extent of detail with examples and incidents that would be impracticable, and yet they can only faintly be inferred from the very general statement which must be made here. In a word, they are charged with the immediate control and management of the service in their respective districts, and the high reputation which the conduct of the service, as a whole, has attained throughout the country and the maritime world, and the honor which has come to the nation through the remarkable achievements of its valiant crews, are due in much larger measure than may be supposed to the integrity and fidelity with which these officers have discharged their trust.

The office work comprises a large variety of subjects and details. The superintendents must ascertain the needs of all the stations for

annual supplies, and tabulate them in voluminous requisitions, as well as prepare similar requisitions for emergency supplies; examine weekly the transcripts of the daily logs or journals of the stations and transmit them to headquarters; examine and transmit all wreck reports; select and nominate keepers in conjunction with the district inspectors; attend to the enforcement of the civil-service rules governing the selection of crews, which involves much correspondence; complete the pay rolls each month and pay the keepers and crews—in itself a laborious work; render weekly reports of the condition of the funds in their hands, and each quarter an account of disbursements; make sales of condemned public property, and receive and account for the proceeds of the same; supervise and certify bills for supplies and other authorized expenses; make quarterly reports of the general condition of the several stations in their districts as found on their quarterly visits, and conduct all the correspondence incident to these multifarious details. But, as was stated in the annual report for the year 1895, when this subject was under consideration:

The clerical work is of minor importance compared with their other duties, and calls into exercise the least valuable of their qualifications, the chief of which are necessarily of an exceptional character, involving a technical knowledge of surfmanship and life-saving methods not often found combined with the requisite business training. Furthermore, the possession of good judgment, sound discretion, unswerving integrity, uncompromising moral courage, and a standing in the community that commands respect are indispensable. To these considerations should be added the fact that these officers, in their official routine, are exposed to hardships and dangers which do not fall to the lot of ordinary officeholders. During the active season, which embraces the most inclement portions of the year, they have to make frequent visits to the several stations in their respective districts, in most instances extending hundreds of miles along desolate and inhospitable coasts, and distant from railroad facilities, often through storms and drifting snows, sometimes camping out and subsisting on rude and scanty fare, frequently making their way in small boats upon dangerous waters, and always under circumstances as widely at variance as is conceivable with the comforts and luxuries of ordinary travel. They are, moreover, frequently summoned by the keepers to trying scenes of shipwreck, where all efforts at rescue have proved fruitless and certain failure seems imminent, and on these occasions they assume command. In several such instances successful issues have resulted, when otherwise failure must have been inevitable. But their heroic struggles are not always so rewarded, nor are the hardships and perils of their calling always encountered with immunity.

Out of the small number of persons who have held the position of district superintendent in the 12 districts since the organization of the present system, 2 have perished by drowning; 1 has escaped that fate only by mere chance after prolonged suffering in the water; 1 has sustained serious injury in the performance of duty, compelling him to undergo a painful surgical operation; and death has befallen 3 while on their official tours through their districts in consequence of exposure and hardships. Of the 6 who have died, but 1 has breathed his last at home and among friends, and his fate is said to have been induced by privations suffered in the performance of official duty.

The miserable stipend which the Government doles out to men like these is neither just, politic, nor creditable to the nation. Their vocation demands at least four requisites, either of which, among business institutions and business men, is recognized as deserving of high consideration in fixing the compensation of their officers and employees. These are: Exacting and responsible mental labor, involving important interests in its performance; large pecuniary responsibility; expert attainments, and hazardous employment. An effective combination of all these is required from each of these officers, and no superintend-

ent in the service must fall short in respect to either factor. Indeed, the method by which his position is attained almost guarantees the fitness of the appointee.

Few persons tolerably well informed upon the subject would question the duty of the Government to advance the compensation of such of these officers as have charge of the larger districts to at least the rate of \$2,500 per annum. Indeed, in the Forty-seventh Congress, on February 20, 1882, the House of Representatives, proverbially the more conservative of the two Houses in the matter of authorizing expenditures, at least for salaries in the Executive Departments of the Government, passed, by a vote of 133 yeas to 21 nays, a bill prescribing the salaries of district superintendents at the following rates: For six of them, \$2,500 each; for two, \$2,000 each, and for three, \$1,800 each, the difference depending principally upon the number of stations then existing in the several districts. In the Senate, however, after it had been favorably reported from the Committee on Commerce, during a long and tedious parliamentary struggle, amendments were carried reducing the salaries proposed.

In the nineteen years that have passed since then the number of stations has been largely increased, especially in those districts for which the \$1,800 and \$2,000 rates were specified, and the duties and responsibilities of the superintendents have been greatly multiplied, not only on account of the additional number of stations, but from numerous other causes connected with the growth and improvement of the service. In the two districts for which the salary of \$2,000 was named the number of stations has increased from 15 to 30 and from 11 to 18, respectively, and in the three districts for which \$1,800 was proposed the number has increased from 7 to 17, 5 to 8, and 7 to 16, respectively. The bonds of the superintendents for whom \$2,000 was specified have been raised from \$20,000 to \$50,000 each, and of those for whom \$1,800 was proposed from \$15,000 to \$30,000, from \$10,000 to \$15,000, and from \$12,000 to \$30,000, respectively. During the same period Congress has advanced the wages of surfmen from \$45 to \$65 per month.

All of these officers have the supervision of a large number of men—the keepers and crews in their respective districts—numbering in one district 329, and the average in the 12 districts being 163. The average number of stations to a district is 22. It may be safely averred that no other class of officers in the whole Government is so inadequately compensated. Among other officers having the supervision of an equal number of employees and having no responsibility in the charge and disbursement of public funds and giving no bonds there is probably not one drawing a less compensation than \$2,500 or \$3,000. It would surely seem that at least the smaller of these sums might be accorded to the officers in charge of the larger districts and \$2,000 to those in charge of the smaller, where the difficulties of administration are in some respects as great, by reason of the inaccessibility of the stations, the rigors of climate, etc., as in the larger districts.

The stations in the district having the greatest number are generally within a few miles of each other and reasonably convenient of access by railroads, while those districts having the smaller number embrace a much larger extent of territory almost devoid of railroad facilities and other methods of comfortable traveling. The great distance of the stations from the superintending office, as well as their wide separation from each other, also largely increase the difficulties of exercise.

ing proper superintendence. The fourth and fifth districts (coasts of Long Island and New Jersey) are examples of those containing the larger number of stations, while the first district (coasts of Maine and New Hampshire), the eleventh (coasts of Lakes Huron and Superior), and the thirteenth (embracing the entire Pacific coast) are examples of those with fewer stations. In the smallest district, the third (coasts of Rhode Island, Block Island, and Fishers Island), most of the stations are difficult of access and dangerous to visit in the bad weather of the active season (although not so difficult as in those on the lakes named and on the Pacific coast), but in this district the superintendent, in addition to the regular duties of his office, takes entire care of the telephone line, thus saving the Government the expense of a lineman.

If the Life-Saving Service is to continue to hold the acknowledged preeminence that it has attained, either the salaries of those officers must be advanced, to enable them to pay for needed clerical assistance, or most of them must be allowed clerks, which latter course would prove the more expensive to the Government.

It is proper to state that these remarks are not intended to apply to the eighth district, where there is but one station manned by a keeper and crew, the remaining eight being houses of refuge, in charge of keepers only. The salary of the superintendent of that district is now sufficient, and for him, therefore, no increase is recommended.

